

**3<sup>rd</sup> ANNUAL EUCOR ENGLISH TRINATIONAL COLLOQUIUM  
FOR PHD-STUDENTS  
Friday, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2010**

**ABSTRACTS (in alphabetical order):**

**Laurie BEREAU – STRASBOURG**

**The Theme of Education in Presidential Discourse in the US (1933-2008)**

Despite the vast research on education in the United States, little is known about the perception and reception in the public space of the numerous debates feeding the arguments and the positions of specialists. In an attempt to determine the place of education in the public debate, we will focus on the discourse of the United States' number one public figure, the president. Though the constitutional legitimacy of the president to address questions of education is controversial, it can be expected that the discourse of "the steward of the people" will either reflect to a certain extent the concerns of the people, or shape those concerns. Based on the analysis of Inaugural and State of the Union addresses over the 1933-2008 period, this study will attempt to outline a history of education as sketched by the chief of the executive. Those formal speeches will help us appraise presidential attitudes towards the questions of education, determine the landmarks that characterized the second half of the twentieth century, and obtain an insight into the position granted to education in the political debate and more generally the public sphere.

(Supervisor B. Genton)

**François DOPPLER – STRASBOURG**

**“An Iconoclast or a Bumpkin”: Janet Flanner and her “Letters from Paris,” *The New Yorker* (1944-1967)**

This study addresses identity issues in Janet Flanner’s journalistic production from 1944 to 1967. Published in *The New Yorker* magazine, Flanner’s fortnightly “Letter from Paris” was an important tool for the American readership to learn about the effects of the US presence and policies overseas.

Flanner was a very particular letter writer, combining attention to detail and serious commentary and information with wit and humor. In their own way, her letters reflected the political decisions made in Washington and the way they were perceived among the French. As a critic, she was amused by the French-American fight over cultural leadership and bemused by political activism on both sides. As an expatriate in France, her thorough sense of Americanness allowed her to comment on the effects of the American presence in Paris.

Janet Flanner was never fully trusted by her readership, not only for her indecisiveness regarding cultural affiliation (she felt equally at home in France and in America), but also because she was so critical of the icons of a postwar American hegemony in France. Flanner had faith in her provocative reporting and therefore devoted herself to offering a mirror image of America from abroad. Eventually, her handling of both political and cultural milestones in postwar and cold war years underlines her equivocal position: as a journalist, her clear-cut opinion on America was important to the *New Yorker* readership, but she would always remain a country bumpkin—an American expatriate living in backward France.

(Supervisor B. Genton)

**Michael FEDERSPIEL – STRASBOURG**

**Challenging the World: Discretion and Deconstruction in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses***

Deconstruction, as a hermeneutic enterprise, has been labelled at best ungraspable, very often hair-splitting, and sometimes even 'terrorist'. Because of its refusal of any stable binary systems, coupled with a drastic opposition to any kind of prescriptive methodology for analysis, it was delivered as a constant riddle that reluctantly yielded its theoretical core. However, the basic functioning by which it processes obvious dichotomies at play within written works – well below the level of abstraction at which people like Derrida or Miller operated - remains of great interest when it comes to sensitive literary topics. Upheaval is for example very easily achieved on any treacherous issue by simply *reversing* an accepted and dominant hierarchy between two principles. A simple consideration of the various attempts worldwide at introducing a female candidate in the presidential race of a phallogratic community will convince the reader of it. However, there is more to deconstruction than mere subversion or provocation by inversion, which accounts for its success beyond the limits of a French philosopher's lair. Thus, Rushdie meets Derrida not only on the use of puns and quibbles, but on the subtlety brought about by the most elusive deconstructionist approach in terms of how it revises existing systems of thoughts. Beyond obvious and doubtlessly provocative statements, issued by conspicuous secondary characters in *The Satanic Verses*, I will show that a whole background mechanism works under cover to undermine age-old stagnant patterns and initiate soft revolutions, with effects sometimes more powerful than frontal criticism.

(Supervisor: C. Sturgess)

**Olivier FISCHESSE** – STRASBOURG

**Poetics of controversy: A study of Bryan Merryman's satirical poem *Cúirt An Mheán Oíche* (*The Midnight Court*, composed circa 1780) as translated from the Irish by Frank O'Connor in 1945**

Originally composed around 1780 by a schoolteacher and farmer from County Clare, *Cúirt an Mheán Oíche* is recognised as one of the greatest works of comic literature ever published in Ireland. It is a highly suggestive, bawdy narrative poem which explores the familiar themes of free love, the predicament of young women forced to marry old men, the falling population caused by the scarcity of husbands, the questioning of clerical celibacy as well as the sexual licentiousness of priests. This raucous portrait of eighteenth-century Gaelic Ireland was translated into English by the Irish author Frank O'Connor in 1945 under the title *The Midnight Court, a Rhythmical Bacchanalia from the Irish of Bryan Merryman*. The translation was instantly banned by the censorship board of the Irish Free State for being “indecent” and “obscene”, while the original poem was allowed to be published without restriction. In my talk, I will examine how this translation of a classic Irish poem came to be considered an immoral threat by the Irish government, which went on to accuse Frank O'Connor of deliberately introducing into his translation “indecent” material which was not to be found in the original. While this allegation was proven wrong, we may still wonder why O'Connor chose to publish the translation of a poem with such explicit content – especially since he surely knew from bitter experience that a writer at the time would not have to try very hard to fall foul of the Censorship of Publications Act of 1929, to have his works banned and, more often than not, have his whole life shattered.

(Supervisor: C. Ross)

**Marko Glaubitz (Ph.D., Freiburg)**

**Of Robots, Androids and Toasters – (Post)human roots and visions in contemporary science fiction characters**

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The tradition of 'robotic' characters in literature has been in existence for more than 2000 years and has undergone profound changes which are interwoven with the transformation of human society. One of my main research foci is to establish a connection between the concept of (post)human 'reality' in the 21st century and the development and evolution of artificial humanoid life forms in science fiction. These characters act as a canvas for projecting and experimenting with the concept of a posthuman society populated by networked posthuman individuals who have overcome most traditional limitations concerning the controversy between congruent mindsets and individualism.

In this talk, I will briefly trace the history of mechanical, robotic and android characters to establish a working definition of the terms 'robot' and 'android'. For many readers, the term 'robot' is tightly connected to one of the most important American science fiction writers of the 20th century, Isaac Asimov; as is the case for the term 'android' and yet another major American science fiction writer, Philip K. Dick. I will touch upon the ambiguous character of both Asimov's famous "Three Laws of Robotics" and Dick's use of 'empathy' as a possible distinguishing mark between humans and androids.

I will put a special focus on the TV series *Battlestar Galactica* (2003-2010) and its new kind of artificial life form - the Cylons. The Cylon models range from purely mechanical, to hybrid and finally to entirely organic nodes which provide an abundance of fascinating controversies and stand out as pivotal examples of posthuman agents. The Cylons, for instance, form a fully-fleshed society, possess their own religion and social structures, and blend so deeply into their 'natural' human counterparts' image in the course of the series that multiple transitions of single characters between the concepts of 'human' and 'posthuman' take place. This blending amounts to an almost comically ironic effect as the audiences' sympathies are increasingly shared between 'proper' human characters and the genocidal, artificial Cylons. Finally, I will conclude with an outlook over the research potential which such (post)human characters pose in terms of a literary, cultural and philosophical analysis.

**Theresa Hamilton (Ph.D., Freiburg)**  
**Humorous Structures in Comic English Narratives, 1200-1600**

We all have the ability to recognise and create humour, but we rarely ever think about *how* we do it. My project explains these workings of humour, using a combination of linguistic and narratological theories on a corpus of comic English narratives.

I will apply and assess one of the most influential linguistically-based theories in this area, Raskin & Attardo's General Theory of Verbal Humor. This theory uses the tool of the 'script' as a chunk of cultural knowledge, claiming that any instance of verbal humour is caused by the collision of two such scripts that nevertheless overlap in at least one aspect. The General Theory of Verbal Humor analyses every case of such script opposition in a text and is thus a detailed and substantial method of discussing comic texts.

Although useful for explaining short jokes, however, this theory is not able to explain sufficiently the workings of more complex narratives. I will therefore suggest a complementation with Thomas J. Cooke's narratological Theory of the Comic Climax. This theory posits that every element in a humorous narrative is aligned to create a comic climax of surprise and satisfaction and thus includes the more global perspective on the artistic arrangement of the narrative.

My project will test the efficacy of the combination of these theories on different humorous genres. This will reveal similarities between texts of the same genre and verify (or contest) existing interpretative claims. Combining the two to take a detailed look at both the individual parts and their arrangement in the narrative whole, we are one step closer to understanding the linguistic, narratological and cultural machinery behind humour.

**Samira KHEMKHEM – STRASBOURG**

**The Image of the USA in Egypt: an historical background (1890s-1980s)**

A number of historical facts have contributed to the present image of the United States in Egypt. They have an unsuspected impact on the complexity of the perception of Americans in the Egyptian mainstream media and culture. The first encounters of Egyptians with the United States, almost unknown to the American public, are surprisingly very recent and almost insignificant in number. However, they had a major influence on the current picture of the USA. What were the most important historical events, travel accounts, American as well as Egyptian policies that shaped the Egyptian awareness of the United States? Astounding though it may seem, the United States was tremendously popular in Egypt at the end of the nineteenth century. Then, the twentieth century witnessed the construction of a multifaceted American image with periods of Egyptian indifference and others of high interest in the American persona and diplomacy. We shall look into the Egyptian perception of the United States in the First and Second World Wars, The Suez Canal Crisis (1956-1957), the Cold War, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (1948-1990) trying at the same time to point out the key aspects that had a direct influence on today's representation(s) of the United States.

(Supervisor B. Genton)

**Agnes Schneider (Ph.D., Freiburg)**  
**Morphosyntactic Variation in Ghanaian English**

In Ghana, as in many other African countries, the use and status as an official language of English is a result of colonial history. Introduced via the more formal sectors such as education during the colonial period, English has ever since gained a high number of (especially second language) speakers with an increase in use especially since independence in 1957. While it still has the status of an H-variety, English in Ghana is also increasingly used in more informal contexts where it is typically accompanied by heavy code-switching and borrowing from the indigenous languages.

The study focuses on morphosyntactic variation in 'Educated Ghanaian English', more specifically, at variation in the domains of tense and aspect marking. These include the use of the Progressive and future time marking – both areas of English grammar which have undergone and are still undergoing rapid changes in the standard. I will give a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the use of the Progressive in Ghanaian English. The data used for this study is a collection of spoken texts gathered in Ghana in 2008 and 2010 as well as written texts from different text categories of the Ghanaian component of the International Corpus of English (ICE). For the purpose of comparison, a comparable number of texts from ICE-Great Britain are analyzed.

A more extensive use of the progressive is a feature which has been mentioned for Ghanaian English but also within the more general context of *Postcolonial* or *New Englishes*. Typically, explanations offered with respect to the development of this phenomenon range from the importance of substrate influence to the claim of so-called 'universals' of *New Englishes* (i.e. learner errors). As the English progressive is generally characterized as a category developing toward a more extended meaning range, the question arises whether its use in Ghanaian English is indeed a phenomenon whose development can be attributed to the socio-history and the contact situation under which it developed, or whether it merely reflects the continuation of what has been going on in the major standard varieties (British and American English) themselves.

First quantitative results show a slightly more frequent use of the progressive in the spoken and more informal or non-printed written texts in Ghanaian English, while a higher use can be observed in press editorials and press news reports in the British data. This is largely in line with what has been subsumed under the 'colloquialization of genres' – a feature observable in British English but virtually absent in Ghanaian English, where a more conservative style is still the norm in written texts. On the other hand, first qualitative results show a higher use of so-called

state progressives in the spoken Ghanaian data. While most combinations of state verbs with the progressive are simply more frequent in the Ghanaian data, other, much fewer combinations are absent from the British data – a possible indicator for an independent development in Ghanaian English, which will be analyzed further on the basis of larger data sets.